

**Abstract 369**

**TITLE:** Factors Associated with the Use of the Female Condom: Preliminary Findings from a Couples HIV Prevention Intervention

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**ISSUE:** Research on women's acceptance of female condoms is encouraging but most findings are constrained by selectivity issues, small samples, and data collection restrictions. One important limitation is the lack of data on male partners' attitudes towards and acceptance of the device. Although less than the male condom, using a female condom still requires partner's acceptance and some cooperation to achieve maximum protection. Adoption of the female condom thus relies on both partners' familiarity with it, its use, advantages and disadvantages compared to male condoms. This analysis builds upon findings from a previous HIV prevention intervention for women. Its main contribution is data on male partners' attitudes and reactions to using female condoms.

**SETTING:** African-American, white, Hispanic and ethnically mixed heterosexual couples (ages of 18-45) were recruited from community agency sites in South Florida for participation in a cognitive-behavioral HIV prevention intervention study. Data collection and group sessions were conducted by ethnicity and gender-matched interviewers and session leaders.

**PROJECT:** Data for this analysis come from the project's pilot phase. To be eligible individuals and/or their partners had to be at risk for HIV/STDs infection and both partners had to participate. About 200 couples have so far completed the baseline survey and over 120 have completed the posttest. Couples were randomly assigned to either the control group or the experimental group which attended four 2-hour intervention sessions grounded in social learning theory. Both partners in the experimental group were instructed in the use of the female condom and encouraged to use it.

**RESULTS:** A previously conducted HIV prevention intervention for women found that almost 30% of the women (especially minorities) tried the female condom in the month subsequent to its introduction and those who used it at least half the time tended to be young, single and had less than a high school education. In the present study we examined male partners' attitudes towards the condom as a factor influencing women's willingness to try and adopt the device. The effects of each partner's attitudes on female condom use and adoption are discussed. Detailed information about the use of the condom is described as well as the characteristics differentiating those who adopted it from those who just tried it and those who did not try it.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** To eliminate barriers to HIV prevention both partners should be informed about strategies and methods of reducing their risk. Involving male partners in the decision-making process is likely to improve the woman's willingness to try new methods (e.g. female condom) and help reduce any male resistance to protected intercourse. Implications of the importance of males' attitudes toward the female condom on the content of HIV prevention interventions are discussed.

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